

Application No. 10/045,247  
Amendment dated April 21, 2004  
Reply to Office Action of January 21, 2004

**REMARKS/ARGUMENTS**

Responsive to the Official Action mailed January 21, 2004, applicants have further amended the claims of their application in an earnest effort to place this case in condition for allowance. Specifically, independent claim 1 has been amended. Reconsideration is respectfully requested.

As previously noted, applicant's inventive method contemplates a highly efficient process for manufacture of nonwoven fabric products which are particularly suitable for certain types of end-use applications, including use as a so-called "bottom weight" fabric in the apparel industry, or as a window covering, bed covering, or furniture cover in connection with the home fashion industry.

As specifically set forth in the pending claims, applicants' method contemplates that a precursor web be provided comprising a blend of synthetic and natural fibers, and that the web be subjected to hydroentanglement to form a patterned and imaged nonwoven fabric.

In clear distinction from cited U.S. Patent No. 3,485,706, to Evans, applicants' method further contemplates that the hydroentangled fabric be subjected to laundering to thereby cause slippage between the fibers of the fabric. By this process step, the fabric takes on a stressed or wrinkled appearance, by virtue of the slippage between the fibers of the fabric.

In clear distinction from the prior art, the laundering step of applicants' method is an integral aspect of the formation process, and not merely incidental to ordinary use of

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the fabric. To clarify this important distinction, applicants' method specifies that the nonwoven fabric is formed into a roll subsequent to the laundering step, with roll-formation of the fabric thereafter facilitating storage and shipment, and eventual use for fashion and home furnishing applications.

In the Action, the Examiner sets forth her position that the process disclosed in Evans would also result in slippage between fibers, "especially in view of the fact that the hydroentanglement process would cause the fibers to move or 'slip' relative to each other". The Examiner noted that prior to amendment, applicants' claims did not specify that the fabric takes on the desired distressed or wrinkled appearance due to slippage caused by laundering.

Accordingly, by this Amendment, applicants have revised their method claims to particularly recite that such slippage is caused by the recited laundering step, which is a specific step of their claimed process, and not merely incidental laundering. It is respectfully maintained that such a formation process is clearly not suggested or taught by Evans, which has no teachings or suggestions relating to formation of a fabric having a distressed or wrinkled appearance, much less any teaching or suggestion of effecting such fabric formation by subjecting a hydroentangled fabric to laundering, prior to completion of the manufacturing process.

In view of the foregoing, formal allowance of claims 1, 4, 6, and 8-9 is believed to be in order and is respectfully solicited. Should the Examiner wish to speak with applicants' attorneys, they may be reached at the number indicated below.

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The Commissioner is hereby authorized to charge any additional fees which may be required in connection with this submission to Deposit Account No. 23-0785.

Respectfully submitted,

By   
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April 21, 2004